UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/1999/NGO/51
29 January 1999

ENGLISH*
Original: FRENCH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-fifth session
Item 11 (g) of the provisional agenda

CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE QUESTIONS OF: CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION TO MILITARY SERVICE

Written statement submitted by War Resisters' International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council Resolution 1996/31.

[11 January 1999]

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* Translation supplied by the submitting organization.

1. The year 2000 has been declared by the United Nations as a year of the culture of peace, and the first decade of the century is dedicated to the culture of non-violence. We acknowledge these decisions, which reflect humanity's fear of destruction by war, and the necessity of finding other means to solve conflicts. We know there will always be conflicts and that it is desirable that conflicts appear openly. The danger is when people try to solve conflicts using weapons. We demand that an international court of arbitration be entitled to decide on controversial issues, that a conciliation commission be set up to examine such cases, and that mediation be used for better management of conflicts.

2. It appears clear that the only cause of war is the army itself. Of course there will always be physical violence and use of weapons by uncontrolled people. But retaliation by an organized army has as the consequence of worsening a situation of violence, turning it into a civil or external war. We demand the abolition of armies and the prohibition of all weapons - their production, sale and use - from light weapons to atomic devices. We are opposed to military recruitment for national armies and for private militias. We recall the fact that most cases of human rights violations are committed by soldiers.

3. Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the right to life and to the security of the person. It is obvious that soldiers put into danger their own lives and those of their opponents. The setting-up of an army is already a violation of this article of the Universal Declaration. The international covenants have provided scandalous exceptions for armies in case of forced labour and capital punishment. We must make armies illegal and declare any armed establishment as illegitimate. Every person assembling an army should be considered responsible for a crime against humanity and brought to court for trial. Until now only defeated militaries have been condemned and even these not always.

4. Einstein said: If humanity does not destroy weapons, weapons will destroy humanity. It is high time at the dawn of the twenty-first century to abolish weapons and armies. The Conscientious Objectors by their refusal of any violence are witnessing today the peace we are longing for. They deserve the unanimous support of the Commission on Human Rights.